

North

N.W.T. shuts its borders as 1st case of COVID-19 confirmed in territory

Person in self-isolation; chief public health officer apologizes for not notifying public of raised risk

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An N.W.T. highway transport officer stops vehicles coming in and out of Enterprise, N.W.T, located north of the Alberta-N.W.T. border, to let them know of a travel ban for non-residents into the territory. The territory has

The Northwest Territories has its first confirmed case of COVID-19.

It's the first case from all three territories, which were the last provincial and territorial jurisdictions remaining in Canada to report zero cases of COVID-19.

According to a press release sent out on Saturday afternoon by the chief public health officer, the person had travelled to British Columbia and Alberta, before returning home to Yellowknife.

The individual, and their household, self-isolated after the person developed mild symptoms three days after returning.

"The individual's condition has improved and they are recovering at home," states the news release. Those who may have had contact with the person are being contacted to self-isolate immediately.

During a press conference Saturday afternoon, Dr. Kami Kandola, the N.W.T. chief public health officer, said the government found out about the case late Friday night — about 12 hours before the information was made public.

Previously her department had said the public would know immediately if a person tested positive in the N.W.T.

“No option is off the table as we move forward.”

- Diane Thom, N.W.T. health minister

Kandola said the delay was necessary so her people could contact the person who had tested positive and ensure that person was taking appropriate steps for treatment and self-isolation.

"When we hear about a case of COVID[-19], our immediate focus is isolating that individual or people at risk," Kandola told reporters at a press conference Saturday.

She said the immediate isolation and protection of the person in question, and of the public, was the priority.

"That was our focus last night, it was about contacting the individual first."

She said the individual was not an international traveller. The person did not show symptoms while on the flight home, and returned in the second week of March, she said.

"We need to remain calm," said Kandola.

Risk now rated high

Kandola said the risk of acquiring COVID-19 in the N.W.T. was elevated to high last week. But as of Saturday morning, the territorial government's [coronavirus website](#) listed the risk as low.

Kandola said her department learned the risk had increased to high on Wednesday, and apologized for not updating the website earlier in the week.

Watch the full press conference in Yellowknife at 2 p.m. MT Saturday here:



CBC North's update on the COVID-19 pandemic

2 years ago | 1:00:46

COVID-19 has been confirmed in the Northwest Territories. Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Kami Kandola gives an update on the latest.

The release stated that the public was told the location of the positive case because it happened in Yellowknife, but the public should not expect to be notified in smaller communities. The population of the N.W.T. is roughly 44,904 people, but there are communities that have populations as small as 96 people, according to the NWT Bureau of Statistics' 2019 and 2020 numbers.

Kandola said that in smaller communities, it was a matter of balancing personal privacy with risk to the public.

"We would have to look at the community and look at the population and balance privacy and risk," she said.

'We knew this day was coming': premier

'We knew this day was coming,' said N.W.T. Premier Caroline Cochrane at the press conference.

Cochrane said this first case is being "investigated thoroughly."

"We want to assure the public that we're taking all appropriate measures to keep residents and communities of the territory safe."





Dr. Kami Kandola, the chief public health officer for the N.W.T., addressed reporters Saturday regarding the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the Northwest Territories. (Alex Brockman/CBC)

Cochrane said the government will continue "to take strong actions to protect" N.W.T. residents.

Health Minister Diane Thom stressed people need to take Kandola's advice strictly.

"The threat of COVID-19 poses to our territory is real. The challenges we now face [are] significant," said Thom.

"No option is off the table as we move forward."

Travel ban announced Friday

Kandola has "mandated an aggressive testing strategy" to identify and prevent the spread of COVID-19 across the territory, states the release.

As of Saturday at 11 a.m., 299 people have been tested in the territory, according to the N.W.T. [Health Department website](#).

- [**N.W.T. to close borders to all inbound travel by air, land and port — with limited exceptions**](#)

Late Friday evening, the Northwest Territories chief public health officer announced plans to ban most travel into the territory in an effort to stall the arrival of the novel coronavirus.

Kandola made an order effective noon Saturday that will restrict "all travel" by land, air and port into the territory for non-residents. There will be [limited exceptions](#), says the government, which includes N.W.T. residents and supply chain workers.





A transport officer conducts a roadside check just outside of Enterprise, N.W.T. on Highway 1, Saturday afternoon. The N.W.T. has closed its borders to inbound travellers, with exceptions, in response to the coronavirus pandemic. (Anna Desmarais/CBC)

Kandola said the decision to restrict movement at the border was made shortly before the first positive case of COVID-19 was confirmed.

Travellers through the territory on their way, for example, to centres in Nunavut, are asked not to stop in the N.W.T. during airport layovers.

"Go straight on to your destination," she said.

- [Highways into N.W.T. from Alberta, B.C. and Yukon closed to visitors, transport officers monitoring](#)

Kandola said that if a person wanted to stay in the Northwest Territories, that person would have to undergo 14 days of self-isolation.

The same directive applies for flight crews.

According to a press release from the Yukon government, its officials are aware of the current situation in the N.W.T., but Yukon's borders remain open.

Report on noncompliance

Kandola asked people to report on cases of non-compliance with her public health orders and recommendations.

"We ... had numerous examples of people who were not compliant with the recommendations," Kandola said.

She asked people to email protectnwt@gov.nt.ca to report violations of self-isolation orders.

In a press release Saturday afternoon, N.W.T. RCMP said all of its services are "intact."

- [Gahcho Kué, Diavik diamond mines sending some N.W.T. workers from remote centres home](#)

Police say they're reviewing their protocols for health situations, and will continue to update its plan while assessing the situation with COVID-19.

RCMP say officers may wear additional personal protective equipment when responding to calls, for safety reasons, and for the public to not be alarmed.

RCMP say each detachment will monitor the situation and may decide to reduce or stop front counter services. Some communities may see reductions to non-urgent services like fingerprinting and background checks.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms can include:

- Fever.
- Cough.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Pneumonia in both lungs (which would be seen on a chest X-ray).

What should I do if I feel sick?

The N.W.T. Health Department says people experiencing symptoms can take the [NWT Online COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) or call:

- Yellowknife: 867-767-9120.
- Inuvik: 867-490 -2225.
- Fort Smith: 867-872-6219 or 867-872-6221.
- Hay River: 867-874-7201: Call Public Health at (867) 874-7201 between 08:30 to 16:30. After hours, please contact our Emergency Department at (867) 874-8050.
- Other Communities can call their local health centres, www.hss.gov.nt.ca/health-centres.

Coronavirus prevention



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



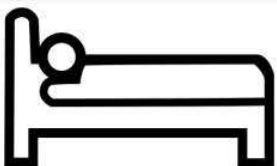
Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.



Stay home when you are sick.

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